Apache Longbow Helicopter Getting Ready for Combat Assignments in Year 2000

The dreaded Y2K programming bug is no match for Apache helicopters, initial testing by the U.S. Army indicates.

The clock is ticking and more tests will follow, but Apache helicopters moved a battle closer to victory recently by launching missiles during a year 2000 battlefield simulation.

During a major U.S. Army firepower and communications demonstration conducted late last year at White Sands Missile Range, N.M., U.S. Army helicopters showed that missiles will fire and communications links will remain intact when the year 2000 -- or "Y2K" as it is known -- arrives one year from now.

The demonstration featured an AH-64D Apache Longbow, an AH-64A Apache and an OH-58D Kiowa Warrior.

More testing on other systems aboard the Army's combat helicopters is being planned to verify that problems will not occur when the clock strikes midnight on Dec. 31, 1999.

"This demonstration was a significant step toward showing that the Army's armed helicopters will continue to operate as planned," said Marty Stieglitz, vice president of Apache programs at The Boeing Company in Mesa, Ariz., where the Apache Longbow, the world's most advanced combat helicopter, is in production. "Our integrated platforms did their jobs -- and we're confident that they will continue to dominate the battlefield well into the next century."

During the demonstration, all system clocks were set to 11:45 p.m. on Dec. 31, 1999. The Apache Longbow, Apache and Kiowa Warrior each fired one laser-guided Hellfire missile and then allowed their system clocks to continue running. When the clocks rolled over to the year 2000, each aircraft fired another Hellfire missile and then acquired targets for fire support.

The AH-64D and the OH-58D transmitted their messages digitally over the aircrafts' single channel ground and airborne radio system while the AH-64A transmitted its messages to the advanced field artillery tactical data system (AFATDS) command control and communications (C3) ground vehicle using voice communications.

The AFATDS C3 ground vehicle received and transmitted targets through its multiple launch rocket system fire direction system to the MLRS launcher for engagement using "call for fire." All missiles and rockets were successfully launched and all targets engaged, the Army reported.

The demonstration culminated a week of dry runs successfully verifying rollover of five critical Y2K dates.

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